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THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE BOOK OF AMOS.

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Among the forces that found their consummation in the epoch of Jesus and his apostles, a prominent place must be given to the work of the Hebrew prophets. Amid internal corruption and heathen allurements, in the face of sensualism and idolatry, the Hebrew prophets were the preachers of a pure morality and the conservators of a living faith in the one holy God. The writings of the prophets, important as they are, have been little understood, owing to lack of appreciation of the time and circumstances of their composition. Their mysteriousness has been regarded as a necessary characteristic, and to deprive them of this, in the eyes of many, has brought the historico-critical method into great disfavor. But according to any rational view of inspiration the utterances of the prophets can never be adequately understood until they have received their proper place in the history of the people.

First in order of time among the writings of the Hebrew prophets is the Book of Amos. Amos has been called rightly "the father of written prophecy." The book occupies a unique position in the Scriptures of the ancient Hebrews. If it were only for its lofty poetry, its grand style, its manly vigor of expression, it would be well worthy of special study. But it is our present task to examine the Book of Amos with a view to its religious ideas, to mark its contribution to the development of the faith of Israel. As before said, in order to understand the religious ideas of any biblical writing, we need to give such writing its proper setting in the history of the people. Let us picture to ourselves the historical situation and social condition of the nation at the time when Amos stood forth as a prophet. It was in the reign of Jeroboam II., toward the middle of the eighth century B. C., that Amos left his flocks in the fields of Tekoa in the land of Judah, and went to Bethel and uttered his prophecy against the house of Israel. The reign of Jeroboam II. was one of outward prosperity and brilliancy. His father, Joash, had left him a kingdom greatly strengthened since the days of depression under Jehoahaz. But it remained for Jeroboam still further to extend the limits of the kingdom of Israel. We have few details of his personal character or of the nature of his wars; but the extensive results of his conquests and the splendor of his reign mark him as the greatest of the kings of the northern kingdom. It seemed as if the royal magnificence of David and Solomon had returned. His sway extended from Hamath on the Orontes to the wady of the Arabah, south of the Dead Sea. The districts east of the Jordan, Ammon and Moab, were reconquered and made tributary to Israel. Little is said of the relation of Judah to Israel at this time. Probably it was not included in the kingdom of Jeroboam. While the reign of Jeroboam II. was marked by outward success and splendor, the internal condition of the kingdom was that of corruption and decay. The country was ruined by prosperity. Rich from the spoils of war and the profits of

commerce, the people gave way to luxury and all its vices. The wealthy indulged in the wildest extravagance. They built mansions of ivory, lavishly fitted out with luxurious furnishings. Attached to their palatial residences were costly vineyards. Along with their abandonment to luxury and the excesses of wealth there was a lowering of public and private morality. Social life among high and low had become corrupt. Drunkenness and sensuality spread on every side. Public festivals and private feasts were the scenes of most revolting excesses. There was withal a general passion for money, no matter how it was obtained. False measures and weights were used in the corn market. Corrupt judges were easily bribed. Unjust exactions of wheat were required of the husbandmen. In general the more wealthy classes oppressed the poor with excessive extortions. There was everywhere lying, stealing, murder, until, as Hosea says, "blood touched blood." Even the sacred shrines of Yahweh were not free from the corruption of the times. The religion itself yielded to the prevailing taint. The old simplicity of the religion of Israel had given place to an elaborate and distorted ritual. The calf-worship at Bethel and Dan had gradually merged into gross idolatry. Also at Samaria and Gilgal calf-images were worshiped. Much of their cultus was derived from Canaanitish customs, and although it was presumably Yahweh worship, yet it presented an easy way for the admittance of all the grosser forms of heathenism. Drunkenness and debauchery invaded the hallowed precincts of the sanctuary. Priest and prophet reeled through the influence of strong drink in the very ministration of their sacred offices. Connected with their religious rites were practices of the most degrading nature. They transgressed at Bethel and multiplied transgression at Gilgal (Amos 4:4). High and low, soldier and citizen, attendant at court and priest at the altar were given over to corruption and vice. Love of virtue and knowledge of God seemed to be banished from the land.

It was in such a state of affairs that Amos uttered his prophecy. It was indeed a remarkable scene when the herdsman of Tekoa confronted the priests of Bethel and the grandees of Israel with his sweeping charges and bitter denunciations. No wonder that his words seemed so distasteful to them (7:16). We do not get the full significance of the work of Amos at this particular point of Israel's history, if we regard him merely as denouncing vice and encouraging a purer form of religion. We must take in the situation and give the prophet his proper position as representing a stage in the growth of Hebrew culture. He was something more than a pure and simple moral teacher or purifier of religious worship. He was a prophet and yet more than a prophet. He represented a phase of the prophetic office which was greatly in advance of what it had been in former times. He seemed to scorn the intimation of Amaziah that he was a prophet (7:14). Evidently the schools of the prophets had fallen in disrepute. He felt that he had a higher mission than that of the technical seer. His task was different even from that of Elijah or Elisha. He did not utter his prophecy against an idolatrous dynasty as such. He did not wish to set up a good king in the place of a bad one. He held a wider view of national affairs. We see in him the prophet as a statesman, as a student of political events. But he represented no party within the state, nor was he spokesman of any alliance with foreign powers. He was a politico-religious philosopher. He looked at the nation both in its internal condition and in its relation to foreign powers from the religious point of view. Although the prophet stood forth as the mouthpiece of God, yet it was a political sagacity, a broader outlook over the nations, a deeper insight into the times, that

put new meaning and influence into the prophetic office. The prophet was a statesman and yet more than a statesman. His view of causes and effects in national affairs was based on moral and religious grounds. Amos saw a necessary connection between the corruption of the nation, the encroachment of foreign powers, and the immediate control of God. Furthermore, we must look to the outward history for some particular occasion that drew Amos from his flocks to utter his prophecy against the house of Israel. With his comprehensive view of the nations the prophet beheld one foreign power which was assuming vast proportions and which threatened the speedy destruction of Israel. It was the power of Assyria that was looming above the horizon as a prospective foe. For a hundred years it had shown its force as a world power upon the surrounding nations, and now Amos saw that it would soon move upon Israel itself. In Assyria he saw the means which God would take to punish Israel for their sins. This is the burden of his prophecy, the overthrow of Israel as the result of their sins. "For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Yahweh, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah" (6:14). It is this one great fact—the impending doom of Israel—that is prominent before the mind of Amos and is the occasion of his coming forward to utter his prophecy.

When we come to examine more particularly the religious ideas of Amos, we must be careful not to superimpose upon the thought of the prophet any preconceived notions of our own. Amos has no formulated creed to present, and is silent upon many articles of faith that we naturally look for in any well regulated system of theology. Much less does he attempt to *teach* any creed or system of religious truth. The prophets are in a true sense religious teachers, but they are not dogmatic teachers of doctrines. They are not designedly didactic. Their aim is to influence life rather than to join together a skeleton of theology. And so in treating of the religious ideas of Amos, it is not necessary to articulate his complete system of theological belief even if we could discover all its parts. We wish simply to mark some of the evidences that we may find in the Book of Amos of an advance in Hebrew faith over that of former times. Although prophetic thought, focussed as it usually is in one burning passion, does not readily admit of any strict analysis, yet in a general way we may divide the religious ideas of Amos into three classes, the ideas in regard to God, in regard to man, and in regard to the relation between God and man.

In the first place, what is Amos' idea of God? What does he have to say as to the existence of a Divine Being? We may say at the outset that he does not discuss the existence of God. It is assumed as a matter of course. But we are interested to know what content he puts into his conception of the being of God. By a mere casual reading we cannot fail to see that Amos' idea of God is more spiritual than the old notion of a Being who could be seen by human eyes, who ate and drank as a man and who wrestled in bodily form. There is a great advance upon this ancient anthropological idea. Nor does Amos conceive of God as confined to any particular place. The old presentations placed God in Sinai. Moses had to go up into the mountain in order to meet him. The ancient theophanies represented him as coming from the south. Later he took up his dwelling in the temple. With Amos Yahweh is no local divinity, but is a practically omnipresent God. Another very significant advance upon the old ideas of God is seen in the fact that Amos does not even consider Yahweh as the God of Israel alone.

Formerly it was thought that as for other nations, they had their own gods, while Yahweh was exclusively the God of Israel. Moab had its Chemosh, Phenicia its Baal, and the idea of Yahweh's control of other nations was foreign to Hebrew thought. Change of country meant a change of gods. On this point we have a noteworthy passage in 1 Sam. 26:19, where David says: "They have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of Yahweh, saying, Go serve other gods." In the first two chapters of our prophecy Amos puts into the mouth of Yahweh the denunciation of the sins of other nations as well as of those of Israel, in a way that would have seemed strange to a former period. Not only did Yahweh bring the Israelites out of Egypt, but he also brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir (9:7). This idea of Yahweh's control of other nations beside Israel, is a great advance in the religious thought of the people. Amos frequently uses the title "God of hosts," in speaking of Yahweh. It is true that the right meaning of the expression is not known decisively, but whatever may be the exact significance of the term, it is evident that Amos had in mind a largeness of conception that was new to the thought of Israel. Further, Amos conceives of God as a *moral* being. He is holy, just and good. According to the old national faith, the most prominent characteristic of God was that of power. He protected his people by his might. He especially came to their aid against their enemies in time of war. If Israel conquered Moab, it was because Yahweh was stronger than Chemosh. It must have sounded strange in the ears of the priests of Bethel when Amos, as the spokesman of Yahweh, said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities" (3:2). He foretold the overthrow of their kingdom because of Yahweh's knowledge of them. It was different probably from anything that they had ever heard before. They had relied on Yahweh's protection. Surely his knowledge of them was sufficient to secure their safety. But Amos stood forth in the name of God and announced that they had abused their privileges. They had misunderstood the nature of God. Yahweh had known them, but they had not known Yahweh. Amos would have them understand that Yahweh was not merely God of favoritism, but the God of justices. Israel must take its stand with other nations and conform to one standard of right. It would be too much to say that Israel had never considered God as a moral being before, but never had the thought been so strongly presented as by Amos.

The consideration of God's righteousness naturally leads us to the idea of man as a moral being or the general subject of sin. What, then, is the idea of Amos in regard to man's sin and transgression? Amos has much to say about the sin and transgression of the people, but he gives no explanation of the nature of sin. He does not attempt to account for its origin in history or to trace its development in the human heart. It was sufficient for his purpose to declare that the transgressions of Israel were an offense to God. It is also to be noticed that the prophet had in mind the solidarity of his people. He did not single out individuals as guilty of punishment. It was the nation as a whole which had committed sin. Amos was deeply sensible of the moral corruption of the times and was bitter in his rebuke of the recreant house of Israel. Yet he is not content to denounce sin in the abstract. He levels his blows against concrete actions. He specifies the particular sins which Israel is committing and which are displeasing to Yahweh. The picture of the low moral condition presented above, in our brief survey of the history of the times, is drawn for the most part from Amos'

own writings. He mentions the individual sins that he may bring them severally under the force of his uncompromising condemnation. It is especially worthy of notice that the prophet seems to pass over the fact of idolatry and impure worship, in order to attack the sins of life and conduct. He is apparently not disturbed about calf-worship and the introduction of a heathen cultus, but he summons the wrath of God against drunkenness and sensuality, against robbery and oppression of the poor. The calamity which he predicts is to come upon Israel, not because of their idolatry, but because they have committed sin. Even when he speaks of the transgressions at Bethel and Gilgal, where heathen forms had been introduced, he does not refer to their idolatry, but denounces the sinful practices which were associated with the worship at these places.

The prophet's idea of religion was that it should open out into right conduct. Yahweh, the holy and just God, requires of his people a well-ordered life. Amos seems almost to lose sight of the worth of proper forms of worship in his insisting upon moral rectitude. The ceremonies and sacrifices of the morally impure are an offense to God. Amos expresses the fierce indignation of Yahweh in the following characteristic passage: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though you offer me your burnt offerings and your meal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols" (5:21-24). This seems an unaccountable sentiment for a representative of a people whose religious life we are accustomed to associate with sacrifices and feasts, with priestly functions and temple service. But we begin to realize the prophet's attitude of mind as he goes on to say: "But let judgment roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5:24).

The contribution of Amos to the idea of sin is not an addition by way of a clearer definition of terms or refinement of theological distinction. The prophet rather stands forth as the representative of an aroused moral sense. He gives expression to a natural human feeling against sin. He places the sins of Israel on a level with the sins of other nations. He condemns his people because they have broken universal moral laws. He calls the Philistines and Egyptians to bear witness against the transgressions of Israel. There is a marked advance in ethical feeling over the times of the judges, when lying, treachery and murder were resorted to in order to carry out the highest interests of the people. So in the reigns of David and Solomon, the life and conduct of God's anointed servants fall far below the rigorous demands of the herdsman prophet of Tekoa. This call of Amos for a pure morality is also a protest against the degrading practices connected with the *bamoth* or "high places," and the *asherim* or "groves," which had been early introduced and had become firmly fixed as a recognized element in the religious life of the people. Amos marks the growing spirit of reform which afterward manifested itself in the measures adopted by Hezekiah and Josiah to purify the worship of the nation.

In our discussion of the ideas of Amos in regard to God and in regard to man, we have unavoidably anticipated, to some extent, the consideration of the prophet's idea concerning the *relation between God and man*. Amos is so fully occupied with the large aspect of Israel's national disgrace and threatened punishment, that the individual is swallowed up in the promiscuous downfall of the nation. So we need not expect to find any definite statement in regard to regen-

eration, conversion or the mystical union of the soul with God. Amos, however, does speak of a union of man with God; and although, at times, he seems to make a personal appeal to the individual, still he refers to the nation as a whole. This union is to be brought about on the part of the nation by seeking God, by returning to him. To seek God is to seek the good, to do that which is right. The conversion of the nation is to manifest itself in outward acts of righteousness. The impending overthrow of the nation which is ever present before the mind of the prophet is the means by which on the part of God Israel is to be brought into proper relations with Him. In the fourth chapter Amos enumerates a number of disciplinary measures that God has taken to bring the nation into a proper attitude to himself. The burden of the passage several times repeated is as follows: "Yet ye have not returned unto me, saith Yahweh." In this way we may understand the meaning of that familiar expression "Prepare to meet thy God." When it is taken out of its connection and used, as it often is, as a text for a personal appeal for a self-examination in view of the final judgment, the immediate application is apt to be lost sight of. Amos opens the chapter with a declaration of the sweeping punishment that God is to bring upon the nation. This is the one final measure that he is to adopt, since less summary judgments have been unavailing. And then the prophet goes on to review some of the unsuccessful ways in which God has undertaken to turn the obdurate heart of the nation, with the repeated burden referred to above. And then in verse 12, speaking for Yahweh, Amos says: "Therefore,"—because my minor chastisements have not availed, "thus will I do unto thee, O Israel"—as threatened in verses 2 and 3, referring to the captivity; "and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"—that is, be ready to recognize in this threatened overthrow of the nation the punitive judgment of God.

In regard to the advance in the thought of Amos over that of former times concerning the union between God and man, we may refer in a general way to what has been said already concerning Amos' ideas of the nature of God and of man and the evidences of growth in these directions. In a more special sense the idea of a union between God and man suggests the question of the *covenant* between Yahweh and Israel. And here again we see that Amos has a much more advanced notion of the covenant relation of Israel than that of former times. The elective character of the covenant, together with the inheritance of the promises, receives strange treatment at the hands of this prophet of Yahweh. The downfall of the nation, as an act of God, would seem to an ordinary Hebrew as a breach of the covenant, but according to Amos it is an act of Yahweh to bring the nation into truer covenant relations with their God. When Amos, speaking to the nation in behalf of Yahweh, declares, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth," apparently we have a strong expression of the favoritism of God in the arbitrary choice of Israel, and we are hardly prepared for the turn in thought as the prophet adds, "therefore, I will visit upon you all your iniquities." Further, Amos does not lay much stress on the institutional character of the covenant. Ceremonial rites have very little value in his eyes unless there is a moral life behind them. God demands not burnt offerings or meal offerings, but the "sacrifices of righteousness."

In our consideration of the advance in Hebrew thought and growth of religious ideas we must bear in mind that this advance was in truth a *growth* and not a progress marked by the external addition of absolutely new and foreign elements.

As Christianity grew out of Judaism, so the larger thought of the prophets grew out of the ideas that, in the germ, were the possession of the people from the very beginning of their history. As in regard to the covenant, so in regard to the whole range of ideas concerning God and man. We have it all in the old germinant thought, "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). It may be said that a growth has taken place along the line of a change in the idea of holiness. Thus we have seen that Amos represents a stage in the progress of the religious thought of Israel. Yet we are still under the Old Covenant. Although Amos denounces his nation and exposes their wickedness, he is nevertheless a Jew. Or, rather, strictly speaking, we cannot, except by anticipation, call Amos even a "Jew." The nation has further growth before it in the matter of thought and life, and Judaism proper did not take its rise until after the exile. However, Amos is consciously one of God's chosen people. In this character he confidently asserts himself before the close of his prophecy. He believes that God has something good in store for the nation. So that the severe, harsh tone of the book is lighted up with a hopeful view of the future. Although Yahweh is the Lord and Judge of all the nations of the earth, yet he has special dealings with his own chosen people, and so Amos closes his prophecy with a bright vision of the future ideal state. It is to be founded on moral principles. The nation will be truly united to Yahweh. The people will reflect the moral and spiritual qualities of their God.

Yet the position of Amos is one of more than national import. Although as the herdsman of Tekoa he denounces the priests of Bethel and the grandees of Samaria, yet he speaks for all time. Although he warns his country against the specific incursion of a foreign power, yet there is a spirit of universality and absoluteness in his utterances. Above all the proper prerogatives of a Hebrew prophet, above all national considerations and local applications, above all lessons to be learned from the immediate issue of events, Amos stands forth as the embodiment of a robust faith in the complete sway of ethical principles and the final triumph of good over evil. To sum up, religion according to Amos consists not so much in belief or worship as in conduct, in a well regulated moral life. This life of rigorous moral virtue is demanded by the majesty and justice of God. For the purpose of bringing Israel to the enjoyment of such a life, God is to visit upon the nation its overthrow and captivity. Amos lays down, for the first time, the principles of a pure *ethical monotheism*.

TITLE ON BABYLONIAN-ASSYRIAN CULTURE. IV.

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LITERATURE AND SCIENCE.

A striking proof that the Babylonians attained a high degree of civilization at a very early period is the fact that the invention of writing lay in the remote past. The oldest inscriptions, dating back forty centuries before our era, are written in a character which, in imitation of the terminology of Egyptologists, has been called hieratic. This was derived from an older hieroglyphic writing, and while in